

Accessibility in the State of Indiana

Executive Summary:

Due to the increasing awareness of the needs of people with disabilities, the state of Indiana is adopting Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. This is implemented within the executive branch of Indiana state government, and with legislation passed last year, a similar plan will soon be formulated for the administrative, judicial and legislative branches as well as all local government offices. Additionally, Indiana is taking action to address polling places and voting machine accessibility.

As required by HEA 1926, the Information Technology Oversight Commission (ITOC) formed a group in 2001 to develop standards for assistive technology. The Assistive Technology Standards Group (ATSG) included a state employee with a disability, as well as representation from the Civil Rights Commission; the Protection and Advocacy Commission; the Division of Disability Aging and Rehabilitation Services; Indiana Interactive, Inc; the Procurement Division; and Assistive Technology Through Action in Indiana (ATAIN). The group decided to adopt the federal Section 508 standards.

On August 13, 2002, ITOC approved a policy for assistive technology standards as recommended by the ATSG. This policy covers all IT procurements and identifies how assistive technology standards are to be used to procure IT products and services. If the agency is not able to meet compliance requirements by August 15, 2003, plans were due to ITOC by November 15, 2002. Of the approximately 90 state executive branch agencies, only three have submitted plans.

The policy states that if the equipment, software or system is to be specifically used by a disabled state employee, immediate modification is necessary. Should that necessary modification be unattainable, an alternative means for accessibility shall be provided for the employee. If, however, the IT equipment, software and services are to be used by the public, compliance to these standards is necessary when the system is replaced, significantly modified or overhauled. If the technology is not anticipated to be replaced within one year from the date of the policy, the agency must submit their plan for compliance. A waiver must be obtained from ITOC before a special procurement may be awarded for products or services that are commercially unavailable or are an undue burden upon the agency.

The ATSG continues to monitor the plan and progress of agencies by meeting regularly with state webmasters. The task of addressing accessibility is not taken lightly in Indiana. With over 20% of Americans having some level of disability, the importance of this project is at a very high level. Additionally, ITOC and the ATSG have been working to provide training and tools to assist each agency with their compliancy efforts.

With the backing of Indiana legislators, meeting the needs of constituents and staff with disabilities will be the norm. The benefits will be wide-reaching by opening more doors for Hoosiers with disabilities by decreasing the barriers for interacting and working with their state and local governments. Citizens with disabilities will be able to perform many more tasks. These tasks include the ability to easily read information and interact with their Indiana government on the state Web site and perform tasks like renewing their license plate at a state kiosk. By providing easier access for disabled citizens, the demand on the brick-and-mortar locations will decrease. Additionally, government employees will be able to do their jobs more quickly and easily since Web pages will be accessible by assistive technology, thus improving efficiencies across the state.

Accessibility in the State of Indiana

Description of project:

The state of Indiana needed to identify a way to improve the state's interaction with constituents with disabilities. This plan was to include a way to comply with the federal Section 508 standards and improve services to both citizens and employees. In 2001, HEA 1926 paved the way for the state to define and implement a plan with the executive branch of state government. This act required the Information Technology Oversight Commission (ITOC) to appoint a group of individuals to adopt standards that are consistent with the principles and goals contained in the federal statute that requires computers and other electronic equipment to be accessible to employees and the public with disabilities.

In 2001, the Assistive Technology Standards Group (ATSG) was formed by ITOC as outlined in HEA 1926. Once the working group was formed, they were tasked with developing standards that were compatible with principles and goals contained in the electronic and information technology accessibility as defined under Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The guidelines defined by the ATSG would include coverage of the following:

- Procurement of Information Technology (IT) Products and Services
 - Software applications and operating systems
 - Web based applications
 - Telecommunications products
 - Video and multi-media products
 - Self-contained or closed products
 - Desktops and portable computers
 - Functional performance
- State employee access
- Public access
 - accessIndiana the state's official Web site
 - Kiosks
 - Interactive terminals

With the guidelines developed and the policy approved on August 13, 2002, the plan was rolled out to state agency heads and MIS directors on August 30, 2002.

The policy required that equipment, software or systems specifically used by a state employee with a disability be immediately modified to comply with the standards. If immediate modifications were unattainable, an alternative solution was to be provided. If the technologies were not used by an employee with a disability, compliance to these standards is not necessary until the system is replaced, significantly modified or overhauled.

The policy also required that IT equipment, software and services used by the public must comply with the standards when it is replaced, significantly modified or overhauled. For agencies not anticipating replacing technologies within one year from the date of the policy, the agency must forward their plan for accomplishing this task to ITOC by November 15, 2002.

Lastly, for requests for proposals (RFPs), accessibility compliance must be at least 10% of the total evaluation criteria and must be a requirement for bids and quotations unless the product or service is commercially unavailable or an undue burden on the agency. In this case, the agency must get a waiver approved by ITOC before a special procurement may be awarded.

Accessibility in the State of Indiana

With the policy created and approved, the ATSG rechartered itself as the Assistive Technology Standards Implementation Group to address procurements, waivers and complaints. Another group was formed called the State Webmasters Working Group on Accessibility (SWWGA), which draws members from the State Webmasters' Group. The SWWGA defined three of their top priorities:

- Priority 1 - policy education, compliance plan criteria development, standard solutions recommendation and priority setting
- Priority 2 - Web accessibility tools analysis
- Priority 3 - procurement and choosing an accessibility compliance icon for branding purposes

The SWWGA published several documents to assist webmasters in achieving compliance. These included instructions for the compliance plan, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and coding solutions.

A Web site was developed to provide easy access to the ITOC policy, standards, resources and tools. Tools to assist the state webmasters in addressing accessibility issues with their sites as well as all state assistive technology standards were incorporated into the state webmaster's Web site. The site URL is - <http://www.in.gov/webmasters/accessibility/>



The plan and progress of the ATSG and the SWWGA has been communicated by ITOC on a regular basis. Presentations have been given to the ITOC Commission, the State Webmasters' Group, at ITOC's IT Forums.

These groups continue to make progress as they strive to improve government operation by breaking down the barriers to productivity and communication for constituents with disabilities. Presently, tools are being investigated to assist agencies with the identification of non-compliant Web sites. An RFP is being issued for these tools that is expected to result in a quantity purchase agreement. Additionally, the group is addressing not just accessibility but usability. A technology can meet accessibility guidelines but still not meet usability guidelines as they relate to the Web. Other tools being evaluated include accessibility development tools and screen readers such as JAWS or others that would be rolled out as a state standard toolkit.

Accessibility in the State of Indiana

Last year, additional legislation was passed to continue with Indiana's efforts to provide assistive technology for the disabled. House Bill 1724 expanded the membership of the inclusive body to not only include the state executive branch but also legislative, judicial, and administrative branches of state government and all local governments. Senate Bill 477 requires each county election board to conduct training and educational meetings for precinct election officers in an effort to establish standards for accessible facilities and voting systems by January 2006.

The benefits will continue to be realized as more and more of the plan milestones are met. By introducing technology and IT procurement standards, the state is opening the doors for current and future employees with disabilities. Jobs can be performed more accurately and efficiently with assistive technology. Unfortunately, cost benefits are yet to be realized due to the newness of this project, but addressing the needs of people with disabilities is an ethical obligation that all public and private sector businesses must address. With the number of Americans with disabilities on the increase, technology advancements assist with the elimination of barriers that have been so long endured by that segment of the population.

There also are benefits to those without disability when information on the Web complies with accessibility guidelines. Think of how curb cuts for wheelchair access are taken for granted but are used by all. Web pages that are made accessible for people with disabilities will then also be accessible to anyone searching the Web without a mouse, on a tiny screen or with no screen at all. The future of IT is mobility. That means using PDA and cell phones to search the Web, both of which lack a mouse and have a tiny screen. What new devices are just over the horizon? Using hands-free phones and letting Web-based information be read to you is possible with properly constructed pages. As Web technology advances, Web pages written in one language will be able to be read in another language if they adhere to accessibility guidelines.

Constituents with disabilities of both Indiana state and local governments will be able to interact with their government 24 x 7 through the use of technology, eliminating the need for one-to-one interaction that was so long the norm. Assistive technology reduces the need for access to brick-and-mortar locations via either onsite or phone-in access. The same can be said for benefits to employees with disabilities. Employees will be able to perform their jobs and complete tasks more efficiently, reducing the need for non-technology assistance, giving freedom and satisfaction to people with disabilities, and continuously reducing the frustration that has been a fact of life.